
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last year, the Board of Supervisors initiated development of a Trails Strategic Plan and affirmed that recreational trails are a legitimate form of public recreation the County should provide. The plan was to proceed with a three-step decision making process that was “community-based” and provided incremental decisions based on discovered information. One of the steps was to conduct a Trail System Assessment. This assessment was intended to provide detailed information about the status of San Diego’s existing trails, the level of demand for trails, costs, funding mechanisms, and Trail System Concepts. When the Trail System Assessment and associated Trail System Concepts are brought before the Board, they will give direction for a Trail Program that will lead to specific goals and policies, as well as implementation criteria to be reflected in the County’s general plan update known as GP 2020.

This Trail System Assessment provides a full and fair discussion of the benefits of trails; user needs and levels of demand for trails; opportunities and constraints affecting trail planning and implementation; costs, funding mechanisms, and other financial considerations; potential management structures, and Trail System Concepts for implementing a Trail Program for the County.

The culmination of the *Public Needs Assessment* effort revealed through surveys, research, analysis, and community participation that there is a benefit and a need for trails within the County of San Diego. Two specific types of trails represent this need. The first type is a long distance linear “regional” type trail system. This system should be based on an already existing and planned long, linear trail system within San Diego County. Local or community trails are the second trail type. These trails should serve the close-in trail needs of county residents. To help in establishing an appropriate quantity of community trails needed, a baseline or level of service related to existing and proposed population was prepared. This baseline along with other community input is the basis for satisfying future Community Trail needs.

The *Opportunities and Constraints Analysis* identified and analyzed the opportunities and constraints possibly affecting the implementation of future trails within the county. One of the most important elements of this section was the conclusion that the utilization of both public and private lands would be necessary to establish a meaningful trail system. If the opportunity for acquiring private lands for trail easements were eliminated, the available options for trail implementation would be extremely limited. Providing an effective regional and community serving trail system without the use of private lands would be difficult.

The *Financial Considerations* section outlines several key issues related to costs, including the cost of acquisition, construction and maintenance. In general, the County should identify a stable and consistent funding source and all funding possibilities should be considered. This section also recognizes that a successful Trail Program will require the commitment of adequate financial and personnel resources. Without this commitment a Trail Program should not move forward.

The Trail System Assessment culminates in the identification and discussion of two alternative Trail System Concepts - each having a different implementation cost and benefit level. Alternative models for implementation and management are also included. When the Board considers the two alternative Trail System Concepts, an implementation model and management structure should also be selected. The integration of these three elements will lead to a successful long-term program. This assessment recommends the following three elements:

\$ *Concept 1: New County Trail Program/Policy – Trails on Public and Private Land*

This concept proposes preparing a new Trail Program and subsequent policies for the General Plan while utilizing both public and private lands for future trail implementation.

- *Implementation Model 1:* This outlines how the Trail Program would be structured in the County's General Plan. Within the General Plan a Trail Program with a Regional Trail Plan and associated design guidelines would be prepared, providing the necessary mandate that trails are important, desirable and provide a public benefit. The Community Trail Master Plan would be maintained outside of the General Plan allowing for the greatest level of flexibility and modification.
- *Management Structure Model 1:* This forms a two-tiered approach that would place the Trail Program within the Department of Parks and Recreation's Open Space business unit. The program would later evolve into its own business unit as the Trail Program becomes established.

This Trail System Assessment provides the Board of Supervisors the necessary information needed to move forward with a Trail Program. It is critical that the County make a commitment to a trail system strategy at this time so that the General Plan 2020 update can reflect this current assessment and the County's vision for the future of trails. The County of San Diego has a great opportunity to improve on its existing trail system using this assessment as the framework for future planning efforts. If trails are to become the recreational resource that is envisioned by the County then the Board of Supervisors must select a Trail System Concept that allows for a successful Trail Program to be developed.